



## Bottom Line: Save The Crossing Guards

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, February 09, 2009

Coming before the Rules Committee on Wednesday, Feb. 11 at 2 PM in Room 118 is a memo regarding the 64 year-old crossing guard program. In a nutshell, the memo asks that the City of San Jose use \$1.9 million from the \$9 million tobacco settlement monies (which the City receives every fiscal year from the tobacco industry and will receive for the next 25 years) to fund the crossing guard program on a temporary basis (for three fiscal years) to ensure that the program stays intact despite our massive \$65 million deficit. After three years, our economy ideally should improve and the funding for the crossing guard program can be re-evaluated.

The City began receiving the tobacco settlement monies in 2000; before Sept. 11, 2001, and before the recent collapse of the economy. Instead of using these additional funds for core city services, as all other municipalities did, the City set up the Healthy Neighborhood Venture Fund (HNVF).

It's not uncommon for government to start new projects, or create new government jobs with "extra money" that it has. However, my bet is that if people got to vote whether government was to save money or start "new projects" with "extra money" that the people would vote to save money.

There are three groups that are currently funded "off the top" from the HNVF fund. We spend more than \$900,000 on staff to manage the HNVF (please note that this amount equates to between six and seven full-time police officers, or almost enough to open all neighborhood libraries on Sunday), \$2 million on children's health insurance, and about \$2 million on homework centers. After these groups are funded, there is about \$4 million left for the HNVF competitive process.

It's important to note that besides these three groups, there is no other entity or group that is guaranteed funding from the HNVF. Groups need to reapply for HNVF funding every year. Therefore, using \$1.9 million for crossing guards does not displace any group nor does using some of the HNVF monies eliminate anyone's job. In fact, if the

City of San Jose used \$1.9 for crossing guards out of the \$4 million, the HNMF would still have more than \$2 million left for its competitive process.

Also important to note: The City of San Jose gives approximately \$30 million to non-profits every fiscal year, as reported by the city auditor in December 2008. I believe the City is doing a very good job of funding non-profits.

Members of some non-profit groups have said that the crossing guard program should be paid for by Parent Teacher Associations, or that the schools should fund the crossing guard program. I think these statements are out of touch. The crossing guard program has been under the City of San Jose Police Department since 1945; the HNMF, since 2000. Crossing guards keep our children safe on city streets. In fact when the residents of San Jose were polled in a citywide survey and asked if they wanted the crossing guard program cut, 65 percent said "totally unacceptable." When the same residents were asked if they supported reducing the amount of money the city gives to non-profits; 62 percent said totally acceptable.

These are harsh economic times where we have to make hard choices, as you and your family do. Therefore, I support tapping the HNMF fund for \$1.9 (on a temporary basis) to fund our 64-year-old crossing guard program which leaves over \$2 million for HNMF. This proposal does not fire anyone and keeps part-time crossing guards employed and our kids safe on busy streets.

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